

TENNESSEE SUPERSTITIONS AND BELIEFS

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FOREWORD

Briefly, folklore may be said to consist of folk speech and sayings, traditional customs, folk songs and dances, traditional narratives, and superstitions and beliefs.

Folklore has attracted the attention of innumerable authors for a long time, but only in recent years has its importance been fully apparent and its systematic study seriously undertaken. Though, on the surface, folklore may appear to deal with much which is trivial, yet it has important social, historical, ethnological, philological, and psychological significance. It is of inestimable value in the study of comparative mythology, in the understanding of racial relationships, in the tracing of the origin and development of religious beliefs and ceremonies, and in the evaluation of the thought processes of man throughout the history of civilization.

This bulletin deals with one important phase of folklore--superstitions and beliefs of the people of Tennessee, especially of the mountain sections. The collecting of Tennessee superstitions is an enormous task which is yet to be completed; therefore this study is in no sense complete, but merely illustrates the vast possibilities in this field.

In Tennessee, as in other sections of the country, the folk superstitions and beliefs are still prevalent, but with the rapid progress in education, communication, transportation, and modes of living, many of these illogical and eccentric ideas are gradually losing their significance, and in a few years most of them will be irrecoverably lost if they are not collected and preserved.

In collecting materials for this bulletin, valuable assistance has been received from students and teachers in various colleges, high schools and elementary schools, from the records of the Tennessee Folklore Society, and also from Dr. J. A. Rickard, Secretary of the Tennessee Folklore Society. Space forbids the naming of all the individuals to whom thanks are due. Those, however, who have made the most noteworthy contributions are the present and former students of the Tennessee Polytechnic Institute, Cookeville; Professor E. M. Cook, Carson Newman College, Jefferson City; Miss Mary Ferguson Gaines, Cumberland Mountain School, Crossville; Miss Elizabeth Hunt, Baxter Seminary, Baxter; Mr. Conrad Bates, Liberty High School, Liberty; Mrs. Martha Matts, Wheat; Mr. John Arnold, Wheat; Miss Lurlene Carr, Livingston; Miss Nell Bain, Baxter; and Miss Christine Hull, Hohenwald.

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FOLK REMEDIES

1. To cure earache, blow tobacco smoke in the aching ear.
2. To cure chicken pox. Have person with chicken pox lie down on the ground and run some chickens over him.
3. To prevent sunstroke, wear in the crown of the hat, a rattler cut from a rattle snake.
4. To stop a baby's slobbering, go to the brook and get a minnow and let the baby suck the minnow's tail.
5. To stop nose bleed, pick up a stone and let three drops of blood fall on the stone; then replace the stone in the original position.
6. To stop nose bleed, place a pair of pot hooks around the person's neck.
7. To stop nose bleed, let the blood drip on something bright.
8. To stop nose bleed, tie a red rag on the head.
9. To stop nose bleed, let the nose bleed on a knife blade; then stick the blade in the ground.
10. To stop nose bleed, drop a key down the back of the sufferer.
11. To prevent headache, carry in your pocket bone out of a hogs-head.
12. To prevent headache, drink from a spring which flows toward the sunrise.
13. To prevent flu, keep sulphur in your shoes.
14. To cure sore throat, tie a dirty yarn sock around the neck and wear it until morning.
15. To cure sore throat, wear gold beads around the neck.
16. To cure frost-bite, wade barefoot, in the first snow, three times around the house.
17. To cure the shingles, rub a black cat's tail over the body.
18. To remove a birth-mark, rub a dead person's hand over the birth-mark.
19. To prevent drowning, a person should carry an egg in his pocket.
20. To cure toothache, place a bag of warm wood ashes on the side of the face where the tooth is aching.

21. To cure toothache, say a Bible verse every morning for three mornings before the sun rises.
22. To remove freckles, wash the face in stump water.
23. The child that wears a black silk cord around its neck will not have the croup.
24. If you wash your hands in the first snow, they will not chap during the winter.
25. When a baby is cutting teeth, tie a mole's foot around the baby's neck, and it will not have a hard time cutting its teeth.
26. To remove freckles, go to a field of wheat the first morning in May before sun-up and bathe the face in the dew found on the wheat.
27. To cure sore eyes, use water made from snow that falls in April.
28. To cure thrash, the father before speaking or coughing, should blow into the child's mouth for three mornings.
29. The seventh child in a family can cure the thrash by blowing in the baby's mouth.
30. To cure thrash, take the child to someone who has never seen its father and have that person blow in the child's mouth.
31. To cure phthisic, go to a tree and bore a hole in it even with the top of your head; put some of your hair in the hole and when the bark grows over the hole, you will be well of the disease.
32. To cure a pain in the side, put an ax under the bed of a person who is suffering, and it will take away the pain.
33. To prevent night sweats, sleep with a pan filled with water under the bed.
34. To cure a stone bruise, catch a toad frog and hold the stomach of the toad to the stone bruise until it dies. The fever from the stone bruise is said to go into the frog and kill it.
35. To cure rheumatism, bury the feet in the ground for two hours every day.
36. To cure rheumatism, carry a buckeye in your pocket.
37. To cure rheumatism, carry a potato in your pocket.
38. To cure rheumatism, rub the joints in the fat of a frog which has been cooked alive.
39. To cure rheumatism, go near a bee gum and permit the bees to sting you severely.

40. If a woman marries without changing her name, she can blow her breath into a baby's mouth and cure the thrash.
41. To remove a wart, pick the wart with a wooden shoe peg, letting the wart bleed on the peg. Drive the peg in a beech tree and the wart will disappear.
42. To remove a wart, get a dry bone and rub it over the wart, then throw the bone away without looking back.
43. To remove a wart, take a paper string and tie as many knots in it as there are warts on the person or animal. Then, bury the string under the eve of the house, and the warts will disappear.
44. To remove a wart, take a black cat to the cemetery at midnight. When the Devil comes to get his people, command the cat to follow the Devil. Command the warts to follow the cat.
45. To remove a wart, pick up a beef bone and rub the warts with the side that was next to the ground; put the bone back just as you found it and your warts will go away.
46. To prevent cramps, put the soles of the shoes together and set them under the bed at night.
47. To remove a wart, place the index finger on the wart and repeat the names of three preachers.
48. To remove a wart, pick the wart and let it bleed on a thread. Bury the thread under the drip of the house and the wart will go off.
49. To remove a wart, cut a notch in a chestnut switch for each wart. Bury the switch and when the switch decays, the warts will disappear.
50. To remove a wart, pick the wart with a pin, hide the pin; when the pin rusts, the wart will disappear.
51. To remove a wart or mole, steal a dirty dish rag and rub it over the mole or wart and hide the dish rag. If no one finds it, the mole or wart will go away.
52. To remove a wart, get as many small stones as there are warts on a person, tie them up and throw them down on the ground; the person who picks them up gets the warts.
53. To remove a wart, pick the wart until it bleeds, wipe the blood on a grain of corn and let a chicken eat it.
54. To remove a wart, go to an old hollow stump that contains water and wash the hands, or wart, in the stump water. After doing this, walk home without looking back and the wart will go away.
55. To prevent blindness, wear earrings.

56. For epilepsy, catch a turtle-dove, cut its throat, and let the person affected drink its blood.
57. Cramps in your feet can always be prevented if you turn your shoes upside down at night.
58. If you burn a large frog to ashes, and mix the ashes with water, you will get an ointment that will kill hair wherever applied, and the hair will never grow back.
59. When you see a hog rubbing up against a fence, go and rub the wart in the same place, and the wart will disappear.

BAD LUCK OMENS

60. It is bad luck to drop a book and not step on it.
61. It is bad luck to bring a hoe into the house.
62. It is bad luck to sweep the floor before the sun rises.
63. It is bad luck to count the stars.
64. If one dreams about rats fighting, he will have bad luck.
65. It is bad luck for one to comb his hair after dark.
66. It is bad luck to rock an empty chair.
67. It is bad luck to burn apple trees for fire wood.
68. It is bad luck to wash a garment before it is worn.
69. It is bad luck to burn the cob when popping corn.
70. It is bad luck to burn salt.
71. It is bad luck to count graves.
72. If one sees a red bird and it flies down, he is sure to have bad luck.
73. It is bad luck to take the ashes out when there sickness in the family.
74. It is bad luck to make a new opening in an old house.
75. It is bad luck to look at the moon through brush.
76. It is bad luck to meet a left-handed person on Tuesday.
77. It is bad luck for sweet potatoes to bloom.
78. It is bad luck to watch a person out of sight.
79. It is bad luck for a black hen to come into the house.

80. It is bad luck to milk a cow on the ground.
81. It is bad luck to sell a crowing hen.
82. It is bad luck to break a bird egg.
83. It is bad luck to spin a chair around on one leg.
84. It is bad luck to dream of eating cabbage.
85. It is bad luck to see a pin and not pick it up.
86. It is bad luck to kill a spider.
87. It is bad luck to open an umbrella in the house.
88. It is bad luck to sit on a pair of scissors.
89. If you find a cat sitting with her tail to the fire, expect bad luck.
90. Sunning of bed clothes on Friday will bring bad luck.
91. Sitting on a trunk invites bad luck.
92. It is unlucky for a girl to be in church when she is asked to marry.
93. Ill fortune is created by bringing eggs into the house after sunset.
94. It is bad luck for a sick person to cut his finger nails while sick.

GOOD LUCK OMENS

95. It is good luck for a squirrel to cross one's path.
96. It is good luck to see a red bird fly up.
97. It is good luck to spill wine on the tablecloth.
98. It is good luck to dream of silver money.
99. Wednesday is the luckiest day in the week for a wedding.
100. It is good luck to get white flowers on your birthday.
101. If one eats peas on New Year's day, he will have good luck all the year.
102. A cricket on the hearth will bring good luck.
103. It is good luck to look at the New Moon over your left shoulder.
104. A windy day for a wedding is a sign of good luck.
105. It is a sign of good luck to find a pin with the point turned toward you.

106. When starting on a journey, throw a teaspoon of salt over the right shoulder to insure safety.
107. To catch a falling leaf means that you will have twelve months of continued happiness.
108. To find a rusty nail is good luck. The nail should not be picked up, but the ends should be reversed so the luck will come your way.
109. If two or more people go fishing together, they must all cross the fences at the same time if they are to have good luck at catching fish.

BABIES

110. If a baby is allowed to look in a mirror before he is a month old, he will have trouble in teething.
111. A baby will never have the thrash if he is carried over water before he is three days old.
112. Tickling a baby causes stuttering.
113. To trim the finger nails of a baby before he is a month old will cause him to have fits.
114. To prevent colic in a baby, pour hot water in a shoe and give it to the baby to drink.
115. A baby will be a thief if his finger nails are trimmed before he is a year old.
116. If you rock an empty cradle, the baby will have the colic.
117. A child will never be born in a house where peacock feathers are kept.
118. Never put a man's hat on a baby's head, for it will make the baby cut his teeth hard.
119. Tie a buckeye around a baby's neck and he will not be a drunkard.
120. When a baby is a year old, set him in the middle of the floor with various articles (such as a Bible, hammer, piece of money, harp, etc.) and see which one he picks up first. The article will indicate what the Baby's occupation will be later in life. For example, if he picks up or touches the Bible first, he will be a preacher, if he gets the hammer, a carpenter, etc.
121. If a baby is born with a veil over its face, the child will have the powers of a prophet, and if the veil is a triple one, the powers will be exceptionally good.
122. The name of the parent which a baby utters first is a sign that the baby when older will love that parent more than the other.

- 123. To remove a birthmark from a baby, rub a dead person's hand over the spot.
- 124. To stop a baby's slobbering, go to a brook and get a minnow; then let the baby suck its tail.
- 125. A pretty baby will be an ugly grown person, and vice versa.

DEATH

- 126. If you step over a person who is lying down and do not step back the same way you stepped over him, the person stepped over is sure to die.
- 127. If a hen crows, it is an omen of death.
- 128. The howling of a dog for three successive nights is a sign of death.
- 129. The last person whose name a dying person calls will be the next one to die.
- 130. If an enlarged picture falls, some member of the family will die shortly.
- 131. The person who plants a cedar tree will die as soon as the cedar is large enough to shade his grave.
- 132. A creaking wall indicates death.
- 133. If a screech owl remains around a house for two or three nights screeching, someone in the family will die.
- 134. If your thread breaks you will die before the article that is being made is worn out.
- 135. Thin teeth, long fingers, and a leady color are signs of a short life.
- 136. Every time a star falls someone dies.
- 137. If a bird flies into the room, the person to whom it flies nearest will be the next to die.
- 138. If a chicken gets under the house and makes a little clucking sound through the night, someone will die shortly.
- 139. When a dog goes around the house trying to get in at the windows, someone in the family will die soon.

LOVERS AND MARRIAGE

- 140. If you chew dogwood, you will lose your sweetheart.
- 141. If you find a snail on the first day of May, put it in a plate of flour or meal, and it will write your lover's name or initial.

142. If you count nine stars every night for nine nights and put a mirror under your pillow the last night, you will see in a dream the one whom you are to marry.
143. If you find a button and pick it up, the first person of the opposite sex with whom you cross running water is the person you will marry.
144. If a girl owns a black cat, she is sure to be an old maid.
145. When a chicken is on the menu, use the wish bone for pulling in two with another person. The one who gets the shorter piece may put it over the front door, and the first person who walks under it, will be the one whom the person is to wed.
146. If a girl spills flour while she is baking, her husband will be a drunkard.
147. If two forks are placed at your plate you will hear of a wedding.
148. If you see a person whom you know well, and don't recognize it is an omen of an early marriage for that person who isn't recognized.
149. If a child is held down by a hair across his nose, the first word he says will be the same word he will say after his marriage.
150. If a woman gets two forks at her plate she will have two husbands.
151. A hair found in the heel of your stocking will have the same color as that of your future husband.
152. A breaking out on the mouth makes public the fact that one has been kissing the cook and also reveals a fondness for kitchen dainties.
153. Men with fine brown hair, light or dark, make the best husbands. They are quick, thoughtful and less likely to be selfish than extremely light haired or extremely dark haired men.
154. Put the hand of a sleeper into water; he will then tell his secrets or the name of his sweetheart.
155. Fill a fruit jar with water, place a light behind the jar, sit down in front of the jar, hold a mirror up and look in the mirror at the jar. If you see a person of the opposite sex, it is the one you will marry.
156. Women with pale blond hair are impulsive, loving, and fickle; they cannot be depended upon, but make good companions. Women with fine black hair are highly strung. Those with coarse black hair are nearly always ill tempered. All women with dark hair are more tempestuous than those with light hair. The dark eyes and complexions that go with the dark hair denote strong feeling. Dark haired women are more faithful than light haired women.

157. Eating the heart of a chicken raw is believed to make a young woman pretty and successful in love.

INFLUENCE OF THE MOON

158. If potatoes are planted on the new of the moon, they will make all tops and no potatoes.

159. Plant seeds, make soap, and kill hogs on the increase of the moon. If this is done on the decrease, the seeds will not grow, the soap will not lather, and the meat will not shrink.

160. If hogs are killed in the light of the moon the gravy will not be red.

161. Soap made on the old of the moon will shrink.

162. If a hen is set on the new of the moon, the eggs will hatch better.

163. If potatoes are planted on the new moon, they will grow low in the ground and will be difficult to dig.

164. Looking at the new moon with something in both hands brings prosperity.

165. Make sauer kraut when the moon is new, and it will be firm and white.

166. Hogs should be killed on the dark of the moon in order to make a large quantity of lard.

167. Colts, calves, and children should be weaned when the moon is new.

168. Look at the moon some night and say, "I see the moon, the moon sees me; the moon sees someone I want to see." Then name the person whom you wish to see, and in a few days you will see that person.

169. Looking at the new moon without something in your hand will bring misfortune.

PLANTS, TREES, AND SEED

170. A dark New Year is a sign of a good fruit year.

171. When re-setting trees, always name them so that they will live.

172. Never thank a person for plants to reset, for the plants will not live.

173. Beans planted in the morning will produce two weeks earlier than those planted in the evening.

174. Get up early on the first morning in May and plant your water-melon seed before you eat or speak, and you will have a good crop.

175. If you get a section of love vine, and move it to another place, name it after the person whom you want to know is a lover of yours or not, and if the vine lives, the person does love you. If the vine dies, he or she does not love you.

176. For best results in setting trees, transplant them when the moon is new, either in the early fall or very early spring.

177. If trees or large plants are to be transplanted, they should not be allowed to get very big before resetting or they will die.

178. If you are angry when you plant pepper, it will grow faster and stronger.

179. Gourd seed will not come up unless you "cuss" them.

180. If the dogwood blossoms are white, it will be a good cotton year.

SIGNS OF THE ZODIAC

181. If onions are taken up when the sign is in the heart, they will all rot.

182. Corn planted when the sign is in the bowels will not come up well but will decay in the soil without sprouting.

183. Corn planted when the sign is in the head will grow very tall and slender with a small ear near the top of the stalk.

184. A good time to plant beans is when the sign is in the heart.

185. Plant beets when the sign is in the feet.

186. Plant cucumbers when the sign is in the secrets and they will bear well.

187. Plant watermelons when the sign is in the heart, and the melons will be sweet.

188. To transplant a tree when the sign is in the heart is sure death to the tree.

189. Potatoes will have too many "toes" on them if they are planted when the sign is in the feet.

190. If cabbage plants are transplanted when the sign is in the head they will be lousy: That is, bugs and worms will destroy them.

THE WEATHER

191. If the moon is on its back, there will be wet weather. If it is standing on its point, there will be dry weather.

192. When roosters crow in the night, there will be a change in the weather.

193. When a wood fire pops and sputters, there will be a snow soon.

194. If you kill a poisonous snake and hang it up, there will be a storm.
- 195.. It is a sure sign of bad weather for a cow to shake her hind foot.
196. A circle around the moon means bad weather in as many days as there are stars in the circle.
197. When red wasps seek shelter on a bright warm day in the fall, bad weather is just ahead.
198. A sure sign of bad weather is for smoke to settle to the ground.
199. Cobwebs on the grass are a sign of rain.
200. When a tin bucket sweats on the outside, it will rain soon.
201. When there is fog in the morning and it goes up, there will be rain before night.
202. When sheep and goats bleat loud and long, it is sure to rain.
203. When cats sneeze or wipe themselves behind the ears, it is sure to rain.
204. If drops of rain or water are hanging on the tree limbs January the fifth, there will be a wet year, if not, a dry year.
205. If animals have heavy fur, the winter will be severe.
206. If you count the fogs in August, you can tell the number of snows the following winter.
207. It is a sign of rain for a tight rope to slacken.
208. When the dew is on the grass, rain will never come to pass.
209. If corn shucks are extremely thick; or very heavy there will be a severe winter.
210. It is a sign of fair weather if there is a rainbow at night.
211. A late Easter means that spring will be very late.
212. When one sees long light streaks in triangular shape from the earth to the sun, it is said that the sun is drawing water and is a sure sign of rain.
213. When the sun sets, if a pink glow is in the Western sky and the Eastern sky is dark, the next day will be a fair day.

WISHES

214. Make a wish, turning the Bible and if on that page it says: "It came to pass", your wish will come true.

215. A wish will come true if you place a ring on a person's finger, making a wish while you turn it around three times and give specific directions as to when it may be removed.

216. Make a wish when you sleep under a new quilt, and the wish will come true.

217. If you see a white mule, and make a wish, your wish will come true.

218. If you see a blue bird and make a wish the wish will come true before sunset.

219. When a rabbit crosses your path, pull off your hat, spit in it and make a wish. Whatever you wish will come to pass.

220. Make a wish when looking into a well for the first time and the wish will come true.

221. When you hear the first whip-poor-will, turn around three times and make a wish, and the wish will come true within three days.

222. When you see the first star at night, make a wish before you speak, and the wish will come true.

223. Upon first seeing the new moon, make a wish, and it will come to pass.

224. When you see a "shooting star" any wish you make will come true.

225. If you wish for luck evermore, hang a horse shoe over the door.

WITCHCRAFT

226. If a witch should bewitch you, she will probably appear to you next time as an animal. Shoot the animal with a silver bullet if you desire to injure the witch.

227. Lumbermen wrap themselves in fresh deer skin to keep off witches.

228. Any witch or ghost may be destroyed by merely asking them what they want of you.

229. To frighten witches away, sprinkle salt around the house.

230. Your milk will be hard to churn if witches are in it. To get rid of them set the churn in a chimney corner and whip the milk with a switch or drop a dime in the churn.

MISCELLANEOUS

231. If a green measuring worm gets on you, it is a sure sign that you will get new clothes.

232. A hole in your stocking means a letter in the postoffice for you.

233. If you step in another person's tracks, you will have the headache.
234. If you lose a finger through an accident and the finger is buried rather than burned, the place will hurt until the buried finger takes root.
235. If you secretly bury a marble and go back in three days, all the marbles that you have lost will be there.
236. Rotten corn in the corn meal makes the crust of the bread.
237. If you sweep after sundown you will sweep all of your riches away.
238. If, on entering a neighbor's house, you stump your toe, you are an unwelcome visitor.
239. To stop the cry of an owl, tie a knot in the corner of your handkerchief or turn your pocket wrong side out.
240. When chickens hatch, tie the egg shells up and hang them up. The hawks will not go down past the egg shells to get the chickens.
241. Lightening and thunder will cause milk to sour.
242. Keeping a horse shoe in the ash pan of a cook stove is believed to keep hawks from catching chickens in the yard.
243. To keep a dog from running away from home, cut off a piece of his tail and bury it under the front door step.
244. If you hear a dove when you are walking up hill, you will gain weight. If you are walking down hill, you will lose weight.
245. Your hair will grow faster if you will always put what is cut off under the doorstep.
246. If you eat bread crusts, your hair will curl.
247. If the back of your leg itches, you may know that you are to go on a long journey.
248. If you lie with your head toward the fire, you will be ill.
249. If you scream when your little finger is pinched, you cannot keep a secret.
250. If your finger nails do not taper at the end, you will have to work for a living.
251. If you open your mouth when you kill a thousand-leg, it will count your teeth and cause them to drop out.
252. A sore on the tip of your tongue is a sign you have told a lie.